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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KMPI](#) [JA](#) [AE](#)
SUBJECT: DEMARCHE: CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION IN 2008
BMENA EVENTS

Sensitive but unclassified. Please handle accordingly.

Summary

¶1. (SBU) Embassy is requested to meet with MFA Assistant U/S Haidan or other appropriate UAEG official to press the UAEG to include the same number of civil society representatives in G8-Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) events in 2008 as were included in 2007 events, and to announce the 2008 schedule as soon as possible.

Objectives

¶2. (SBU) Department requests that Embassy pursue the following objectives:

--Inform the UAEG of the strong, positive tradition of civil society participation in BMENA events, including the Forum for the Future. NGOs that participate want to forge constructive relationships with governments to promote reform, not to embarrass governments.

--Urge the UAEG to invite at least the same number of civil society representatives in each event as were included in 2007, drawing on the numbers in paragraph 6.

--Note that civil society organizations are already organizing themselves for this year's events but they seek official notification as soon as possible from the UAE and Japan on the dates, locations, and numbers of participants. Inform the UAEG that civil society groups will likely organize the "parallel forum" a few days before the Forum in mid-October.

Reporting Deadline

¶3. (U) Embassy should report results of efforts by cable to NEA/PI Blake Thorkelson by April 9.

Background

¶4. (SBU) Since the inception of BMENA in 2004, civil society has been an important and growing element of the initiative. Among its objectives, BMENA seeks to support civil society activists in their efforts to promote democracy and reform, and to foster cooperative relationships with governments in achieving reform goals. Civil society representatives

participate in the annual Forum for the Future and the Forum Subministerial, making recommendations for action by civil society groups and governments. While NGO participation can cause nervousness with some governments, BMENA events have not been used in the past as platforms to attack governments. The NGOs that participate have consistently demonstrated their interest in working constructively with governments.

15. (SBU) Civil society organizations are planning and implementing their activities for 2008 but need to know from this year's Forum co-hosts, the UAE and Japan, the schedule of events and how many of their representatives will be included. This will only help to focus the constructive participation of civil society in these meetings. Any backtracking on the numbers of participants would be taken as a negative signal from governments and negatively affect BMENA's atmosphere of cooperation.

16. (SBU) For 2008, we recommend the following numbers of civil society participants:

--Forum Subministerial: 25 (same as 2007 subministerial)
--Fall planning meeting (if any): 4
--Forum Ministerial: 60 (56 were invited to the 2007 Forum in Yemen, which was canceled, and 54 participated in Jordan in 2006)

We understand from Japan that the UAE is agreeable to an NGO-organized "parallel civil society forum" as has taken place successfully the last three years. The parallel forum has been an effective vehicle to expand the scope of civil society participation in the Forum process, outside of those leaders who can attend the official events. This event, which involves hundreds of NGOs, does not fall under the auspices of the government but government officials are invited to participate. For example, Yemeni FM Qirbi attended last year's Parallel Civil Society in Sanaa and expressed his support for the initiative, and was joined by other foreign governmental representatives. Japan has informed us that the UAE is planning for a parallel forum in early June, but organizers likely will hold it in mid-October, a few days before the Forum.

17. (SBU) BMENA events will occur in the coming few weeks. Japan will host a government planning meeting in Tokyo on April 24-25, and leaders of the NGO coordination group, the Democracy Assistance Dialogue (DAD), are planning a strategy meeting in Istanbul in early May. It is critical that the UAEG officially announce dates for the Forum Subministerial and Ministerial, with numbers of civil society participants, as soon as possible to maintain momentum and ensure successful events this year. We understand from Japan and the UAE that current planning is for a subministerial in Dubai on June 10 and the Forum ministerial on October 19. (Note: Japan has already made the points in para 2 and has asked for our assistance in reinforcing them. Japan also has encouraged the UAE to cooperate with us on BMENA civil society issues. End note.)

Point of Contact

18. (U) Please contact NEA/PI Blake Thorkelson (776-8307) or Laura Schulz (776-8691) for additional information.
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